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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
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**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**1931 February 18**

**Radio address re Crippled Children**

Radio Address, February 18, 1931

*Crippled Children, February 18, 1931*

*My Friends:*

There are some days—and this is one of them—when I wish that instead of being in Albany I could be in the splendid climate of Arizona. I got back only a few minutes ago from the Capitol where we have been so busy today and on previous days that I have not had an opportunity to prepare any kind of a formal talk over the radio today, and so what I am going to say will be very informal; but I can assure you that it comes very much from my heart.

Back in December I had a letter from the Arizona Society for Crippled Children telling me that this week they were going to have an "Everybody's Week" and that during this week every man, woman and child in Arizona will be urged to contribute as many pennies as he already is years old, for the benefit of crippled children in the state of Arizona. This was backed up a little later by an urgent request from my old friend Governor Hunt of Arizona and by many other friends in that state. I could not well refuse that to Arizona, and when later I found that my words were to be broadcast to people interested in crippled children and to crippled children themselves in every state in the Nation, I just had to talk.

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I believe it was announced that I was going to talk today on why it pays to do things for crippled children, and, I might add to that, other kinds of cripples—grown-up cripples as well. I want to talk, of course, about the big human side of relieving distress and helping people to get on their feet, but at the same time I think there is another phase of the broad question of looking after cripples that some people have never given much thought to—the financial side. For instance, I am told that there are somewhere between three and four hundred thousand cripples in this country today—I mean cripples who are pretty thoroughly put out of business, who cannot get around, who cannot perform any useful task—people, in other words, most of them children, who have to be looked after by other people. Think of it—three or four hundred thousand people out of our total population—this is a tremendous percentage.

Now let us figure for a minute in simple terms. Suppose for the sake of argument that three hundred thousand people are out of useful work when they grow to be older and that each one of them, if they could work, could produce one thousand dollars worth of new products every year. In other words, if their productive value were one thousand dollars a year apiece, three hundred thousand of them would mean three hundred million dollars added to the annual productive capacity of the United States. That is worth thinking about from the purely money end of things. If we could restore every cripple in this country to some kind of useful occupation it would do much to help the general welfare and well-being of the United States.

People know well that restoring one of us cripples—because as some of you know, I walk around with a cane and with the aid of somebody's arm myself—if we could restore these children and grown-ups to useful occupation, it would cost money to do it. Being crippled is not like many other diseases, contagious and otherwise, where the cure can be made in a comparatively short time; not like the medical operation where one goes to the hospital and at the end of a few weeks goes out made over again and ready to resume life. People who are crippled take a long time to be put back on their feet—sometimes years, as we all know. Take it from that angle. Suppose for the sake of argument it costs one thousand dollars a year for a crippled child to be put back on his feet and that it takes five years to do it. The cost to the community—because it has to be community effort in most cases, for most families cannot afford it—is five thousand dollars to put that one individual back on his feet. Remember that most of the cripples can in some shape, manner or form be brought back to useful life. Suppose they are brought back so that at the time they are 20 or 21 they have before them the expectation of a long and useful life,—perhaps at least 40 years more,—and during those 40 years each one of them ought to be able to earn one thousand dollars a year. There is forty thousand dollars added to the country's wealth, at a cost of only five thousand dollars. So the net saving or profit to the state or country as a whole is thirty-five thousand dollars. That shows it pays from the money point of view if from no other.

At the present time in the United States, they tell me, there are about thirty thousand new cases every year of people who become crippled from one reason or another. The first thing we are trying to do everywhere is to cut down that number of new cases; and I have a letter from my old friend Daddy Allen, whom a great many people all over the United States know,—the man who started The International Society for Crippled Children which has branches in every civilized country of the world—he tells me that work is going on in every state in this Union to prevent people from getting crippled, and he hopes that as a result, within a short time, instead of having thirty thousand cases, we will be able to cut it down to twenty thousand. That would be a tremendous saving if by preventive measures we can keep ten thousand children every year from becoming crippled.

Of course, modern medical science is trying to prevent diseases and troubles of all kinds just as much as it is trying to make cures. This calls for better understanding on the part of the people, for better education on the part especially of the parents, for better conditions surrounding the birth of children, better care in the home, and, equally important, prevention of many

unnecessary accidents of all kinds,—automobile accidents, train accidents, and so on. So the first step is to work for the prevention of crippling. This covers the great advances that have been made in preventing industrial accidents,—the prevention of unnecessary injuries that come to people who are at work not only in factories but also in the field, in nearly every state of the Union. The United States now is working hard and expending much money to prevent these industrial accidents. They are far too common, but much has been accomplished and more will be accomplished in the years to come.

Now for the second step—the work of finding cripples all over the United States. We in the State of New York have had surveys made not only in the cities but also in the country districts and even out to the remote farms that are not reached by R. F. D. carriers. We have had surveys made and have found literally thousands of children and grown-ups who were crippled and had no medical care of the right kind. There are probably today not only hidden away in the big cities but also in the agricultural and mountainous parts of the United States other thousands and thousands of crippled children who have never had any proper care, who have never been to a doctor, who have never been to a hospital or been looked over to see whether they could be brought back to useful life. So that second step of finding the cripples is gradually being carried out.

Then the third step—the matter of diagnosing what the trouble is. This step is primarily for the doctors; and yet it is true that our good doctors—even the general practitioners—cannot in many cases consider themselves experienced in what is really orthopedic work. In other words, the average practitioner has to go to a specialist when it comes to treating certain types of patients. All over the United States we are establishing, more and more, clinics run by cities, schools, counties or the state; clinics that are within reasonable travel distance of every home; clinics to which the crippled children can be taken. After they have become crippled or after the people in search of them have found them they are taken then to the clinics and the case is diagnosed. Great strides have been made in the past few years in providing facilities for the operations that are essential in some cases. But also the medical profession is realizing that many operations can be avoided through a system of plaster casts, massage, exercise and other forms of treatment. The main point is to get the case properly diagnosed by the right kind of doctor in the first instance. Then comes the treatment.

The next medical step which up to this time has not been developed far in this country—is “after care.” After the cause of the trouble is known and the first remedies for it have been applied and the child is able to go home the treatment must not stop; the parents must be taught what to do. Visiting nurses go in occasionally to see how the child is getting on, and furthermore we are developing new methods by which “after care” is being given in schools for crippled children. We do not want to take the children away from their education, of course, and many schools are putting in special facilities for crippled children where along with their education can be given the right kind of medical treatment. The point to remember is that the overwhelming majority of children who become crippled can with proper treatment be restored to a useful, active life in the community. It seems to me from somewhat wide experience not only of my own but of other people, the average cripple in this country has about the finest natural disposition of anyone in the community. There is something that comes to crippled children that gives to them happier, better dispositions. They are seldom cross, they are seldom fretful; we nearly always find them ready to co-operate; we find that they turn out well as scholars and that they are ready to assist in every way in the treatment provided for them.

And so this great movement all over the United States is spreading like wildfire. Down at Warm Springs, Georgia, where 120 every spring and autumn, we have what is one of many active expressions of this idea. Down there we take care principally of children who have had infantile paralysis, and the treatment there is not a treatment of operation but is primarily a treatment of trying to restore the muscles through swimming and exercising

in warm water. The same thing is being done in Arizona and in other states that have natural springs, and also in many of the big hospitals throughout the land. The idea is that these muscles of ours that were put out of business for a while can in most cases be re-educated—to perform functions which though perhaps are not as good as normal but are at least functions that will permit us to get about. After all, what is the difference, what does it matter if you or I walk with a limp or have something wrong with an arm—that is a small thing in any life. Suppose we do have to use a crutch to get about, that is a small handicap. What we want to do is to get about, and what we want to do, most of us, is to consider ourselves normal members of the community; and wherever I go—the crippled children's homes, the hospitals, the foundations that are looking after the work at the present time—I find that the crippled children have cheery dispositions and the finest of courage—they have a wholly normal point of view and are absolutely determined to lead useful lives. We who have been crippled are not in any way different from the people who are not crippled; we are the same kind of human beings, except this: we are more cheerful, more optimistic and have better tempers than a whole lot of people who are not crippled. And so you see that we are patting ourselves on the back today individually and collectively. We are very grateful to all the people all over the United States who are making it possible for us and for future generations of cripples to take their part in the world, making it possible for them to lead normal lives.

I want to repeat that not merely from the big, broad point of view of humanity, we owe to every crippled child in the United States a chance to come back. Also, I want to emphasize again that by restoring all of these tens of thousands of children to useful, normal lives, we shall be doing a fine thing, carrying out a great objective for the Nation. I know that we shall have your co-operation. From you who are crippled and you who are absolutely normal we shall have help in furthering this great purpose; we must search out the cripples from every nook and corner of the land; we must do through education everything possible to prevent crippling; we must provide the right medical care; we must spread "after care" to the homes throughout the land.

So, my friends, I am glad to have had this opportunity to say these few words today. We are enlisted in a great cause,—one of the greatest causes of humanity that exists in America today. Thank you very much and good night.

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